
ҚАЗІРГІ ТІЛ БІЛІМІ МЕН ӘДЕБИЕТТАНУДЫҢ ӨЗЕКТІ МӘСЕЛЕЛЕРІ

АКТУАЛЬНЫЕ ПРОБЛЕМЫ ЯЗЫКОЗНАНИЯ И ЛИТЕРАТУРОВЕДЕНИЯ

ACTUAL PROBLEMS OF MODERN LINGUISTICS AND LITERARY CRITICISM

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Positive and negative sides of divorce as reflected in Anglo-American anti-proverbs

In the present study I am going to explore the positive and negative sides of divorce as it is viewed and conceptualized in the body of Anglo-American anti-proverbs (i.e., deliberate proverb innovations, also known as alterations, parodies, transformations, variations, wisecracks, mutations, or fractured proverbs). My discussion is organized in two sections. While the first one very briefly demonstrates the background of anti-proverb research and terminology, the second section treats the advantages and disadvantages of divorce. While the focus of the first part of second section is on positive sides of divorce, the second part of it addresses its negative sides. The anti-proverbs discussed in the present study were taken primarily from American and British written sources. The texts of anti-proverbs were drawn from hundreds of books and articles on puns, one-liners, toasts, wisecracks, quotations, aphorisms, maxims, quips, epigrams, and graffiti collected in two dictionaries of anti-proverbs compiled by Anna T. Litovkina and Wolfgang Mieder.

Keywords: anti-proverb, Anglo-American, marriage, English, American, divorce, husband, wife, positive, negative.

1 The background of anti-proverb research and terminology

For centuries, proverbs have provided a framework for endless transformation. In the last few decades they have been perverted and parodied so extensively that their variations have been sometimes heard more often than their original forms. Wolfgang Mieder has coined the term «*Antispruchwort*» [*anti-proverb*] for such deliberate proverb innovations (also known as *alterations*, *parodies*, *transformations*, *variations*, *wisecracks*, *mutations*, or *fractured proverbs*) and has published several collections of anti-proverbs in German and English (for a summary of relevant research [see 1; 1–54]). Anti-proverbs may contain revealing social comments. More often than not, however, being based on mere wordplay or puns, they are playful texts generated primarily for the goal of amusement. As Mieder states, «Just as proverbs continue to comment on all levels and occurrences in our daily life, so do anti-proverbs react by means of alienating and shocking linguistic strategies to everything that surrounds us» [2; 244].

All's fair for anti-proverbs: there is hardly a topic that they do not address. The most common themes are sexuality and love, men and women, professions and occupations. Marriage is undoubtedly one of the most frequent topics in Anglo-American anti-proverbs.

There is a wide range of aspects of marriage discussed in anti-proverbs. Most of them diminish the institution of marriage. To name just a few, matrimony is conceptualized as a burden and form of torture, bossiness and dominance, constant blaming and arguing, slavery and imprisonment, war and fighting, the tomb of love and diminishing of lust, madness and folly, seeing and enlarging each other's shortcomings, hiding and

lying, aggression and even murder [for more on the negative aspects of matrimony and stereotypical features of spouses as revealed in Anglo-American anti-proverbs and wellerisms [see 3; 112–135].

2 Positive and negative sides of divorce

People who stay married live four years longer than people who don't. It is well known that unhappily married people are more depressed, more anxious, more distressed, less optimistic than happily married people [4]. Not surprisingly unhappily married people might get a divorce. In this section let us have a look at the negative and positive sides of divorce.

Just in accordance with the popular proverb *One man's meat is another man's poison*, i.e. what might be considered an advantage for one, is a disadvantage for another one, divorce is considered by the vast majority of people as a *win-lose* situation: the more one gets, the less the other one gets. So what is expensive for one spouse, becomes valuable for the other one:

Why is divorce so expensive?

Because it's worth it! [5].

2.1 The disadvantages of divorce

Much research emphasizes the severe consequences of divorce. For instance, divorced individuals experience greater rates of suicide, violence, physical illness, increased rates of automobile accidents mortality from diseases, for more, see [6; 42].

The disadvantages of divorce are reflected in scores of proverbs. While the original proverb *It's better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all* claims that «You gain so much from experiencing love that you shouldn't avoid it for the fear of rejection» see [2; 190], its mutation below rejects this meaning by offering another one: it's better to break up your love relationship, whatever pain it might cause you than to get married and later get divorced:

'Tis better to have loved and lost than to be married and divorced [7; 251]. {It's better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all} (For the reader's convenience all anti-proverbs in this book are followed by their original forms, given in {} brackets).

Disadvantages of divorce mentioned in our corpus are of emotional, physical, and most frequently, financial character. Let us observe some such disadvantages and prove their existence by examples from our corpus. Divorce—in accordance with the proverb *Marry in haste and repent at leisure*—is definitely conceptualized as repenting one's wrong choice in a number of our anti-proverbs:

Marry in haste and repent in the Divorce Court [8; 10].

The ones who suffer most from divorce are those who, contrary to the proverb *Marry in haste and repent at leisure*, have not paid enough attention to the selection of a proper partner for life, and have not attributed enough importance to the seriousness of the consequences matrimony will have on their entire lives:

Divorce is the price people pay for playing with matches [9; 236]. {If you play with matches, you get burned}.

The proverb transformation cited above is based on so-called homonymous punning (that is, punning on words spelled and pronounced the same). Thus, the word *matches* as «a narrow piece, usually of wood or cardboard, coated on one end with a compound that ignites when scratched against a rough or chemically treated surface» [10] from the original proverb text is substituted by its homonym [word spelled and pronounced the same] in the anti-proverb, with the meaning «a person viewed as a prospective marriage partner» [10]. Therefore, a bad marriage and the suffering from divorce and its consequences are the price people might have to pay for playing with fire, or matches (that is, their thoughtless infatuation and lust, after whose disappearance only ashes remain).

As we have seen earlier, a number of anti-proverbs from our corpus claim that marriage is considered to be a union which eventually might be terminated. During divorce procedure one's dirty linen is frequently washed in public, which might be extremely embarrassing and hurtful:

Man proposes, woman supposes, marriage composes and divorce exposes. (Captain Billy's Whiz Bang) [1; 212]. {Man proposes, god disposes}.

If one's marriage ends up in a divorce procedure due to one's extramarital relationship, it is no wonder that many people are curious to learn more about the details of his liaison:

All the world loves a lover and loves to snicker at his love letters in court [11; 117]. {All the world loves a lover}.

In the proverb transformation above, most probably it is also the wife who has sued her husband for divorce, and not vice versa. Her decision to initiate the divorce procedure, in vein with the proverb *Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned*, might be her revenge to her spouse for his extramarital affairs.

While the proverb *Love makes the world go round*, claims that love keeps things going, its mutation below states that divorce makethe lives of divorcees and those involved wobble:

Love makes the world go round, and divorce makes it wobble [9; 886].

Divorce might not only put one into the most difficult emotional 4situation or physical condition but might also become one's heavy financial burden for years, due to the dividing of property, paying high fees of marital lawyers, child support, and so on:

What do a hurricane, a tornado, a fire and a divorce have in common?

They are four ways you can lose your home [10].

Nowadays Jesus' words «...So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate» (Matthew 11: 6) and, consequently, the old «Till death do us part» are not an eternal truth any longer:

The present divorce rate is so high, bride and groom must have solemnly promised: Until death do us part [9; 236]. {Until death do us part}.

One of the largest financial disasters might be the case when one might be obliged to provide financial support (that is, to pay alimony) to his (her) ex-spouse.

Our analysis has shown that one of the largest thematic groups of Anglo-American anti-proverbs referring to divorce treat the issue of alimony. Alimony is humorously defined as «the ransom that the happy pay to the devil» (H.L. Mencken) [12] {Pay the devil his due}. The following anti-proverb, being also a kind of definition of the word «alimony», emphasizes the gamble-like nature of matrimonial union:

If marriage is a lottery, alimony must be a sort of gambling debt [9; 26]. {Marriage is a lottery}.

Since paying such «gambling debt» might sometimes cost you a fortune, it is recommended in our corpus again and again that you should think properly before getting married in haste. Let us have a look at the two alterations of the proverb *Marry in haste and repent at leisure*:

Alimony: Marry in haste and repent insolvent. (Life) [13; 13].

Marry in haste, and pay alimony at leisure [9; 26].

Those who have to pay alimony are treated as losers or even fools: alimony.

A fool and his wife are soon parted. See Alimony [14]. {A fool and his wife are soon parted}.

Foolishness is a characteristic very frequently attributed to one's spouse in our corpus, and, therefore, getting married and being married is seen as one's biggest folly:

One man's folly is another man's wife. (Helen Rowland) [12]. {One man's meat is another man's poison}

When spooning is bliss, 'tis folly to get married [15; 355]. {Where ignorance is bliss, it is folly to be wise}

Fools rush in where bachelors fear to wed [9; 59]. {Fools rush in where angels fear to tread}.

The financial burden of divorcees being obliged to pay alimony is emphasized in the following transformations of the proverb *Two can live as cheaply as one*:

Alimony statistics suggest that two can live more cheaply as one. (Norfolk Virginian-Pilot) [16; 49].

Two can live as cheaply as one can pay alimony [9; 26].

Let us prove the idea expressed above by a few humorous quotations [although not anti-proverbs per se):

Divorce often turns a short matrimony into a long alimony [9; 26].

Alimony is like paying installments on your car after it is wrecked [9; 26].

We have discussed the negative perception of divorce by divorcees. As I have just explored, a divorcee might get into a terrible emotional and physical state; furthermore, a divorce might carry an extremely hard financial burden. Divorce, however, might have a number of positive sides too. Let us examine them in the following sub-section.

2.2 The advantages of divorce

One of the biggest advantages of divorce is when you happen to be the person who gets alimony, as the humorous quote below points out:

Alimony often keeps matrimony from being a failure [9; 26].

Those who get alimony are considered to be lucky and smart:

'Tis better to have loved and receive alimony than never to have loved at all [9; 26]. {It's better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all}.

According to recent statistics, most frequently it is the women who receive alimony, since their incomes on average are still lower than those of males; moreover, women usually get custody over children. Additional humorous quotations support this idea:

Alimony often enables a woman who lived unhappily married to live happily unmarried [9; 26].

To some women marriage is always a gamble because they never know in advance how much their alimony will be [9; 26].

Alimony is a great improvement in a woman's lot because it comes in regularly, never quarrels, and never complains about the food [9; 26].

Let us try to explore now what other advantages divorce might bring according to our corpus of anti-proverbs.

A divorce under certain circumstances is considered by these anti-proverbs not only a tragedy but rather a great relief. While marriage is frequently conceptualized in our corpus as war and lack of peace [3; 112–135], divorce's mission—in accordance with the humorous quotation «Divorce is the only institution that has done more to promote peace in the world than the United Nations» [9; 236] — is peacemaking, or freeing spouses from warlike marital union:

Divorces are made in heaven. (Oscar Wilde) [17; 59]. {Marriages are made in heaven}

Divorced couples

United we stand, divided we can stand it better [18; 48]. {United we stand, divided we fall}.

The two proverb alterations above, treating the positive side of divorces, have at least three things in common. First of all, both of them argue with the texts of the original proverbs providing the template for transformation. While the first one emphasizes that it is divorce—and not marriage—which is helped by providence, the second one stresses that divorced people (that is, those who do not stick together any longer) are less harder to defeat than those who are married (that is, united couples). Second, both proverb mutations are examples of a very rare type of anti-proverb, the ones that negate the «truth» of the original piece of wisdom completely by employing antonyms in their texts (the *divorces* in the first example as opposed to the *marriages*, or the *stand* in the second example as opposed to the *fall*). Third, none of the proverb alterations state if such a positive view at divorces reflects the male or female perspective.

Another positive side of divorce is that it also stops the most unwanted interaction with one's mother-in-law (who, while possessing a lot of negative stereotypical traits, is uniformly depicted as a spouse's worst enemy and one of the main causes of divorce)[for more on mothers-in-law in Anglo-American anti-proverbs, see also 19; 171–192]:

Every cloud has a silver lining: when you get a divorce, you also get rid of your mother-in-law [9; 534]. {Every cloud has a silver lining}.

With that I have come to the end of our discussion. Many more marital themes connected to divorce could have been considered in the present article but I must come to a conclusion now. So here are just a few additional humorous quotes about divorce:

Divorce suits are so called because nothing but a divorce seems to suit [9; 236].

Divorce is a marital dissolution that follows a mutual disillusion [9; 236].

If divorce didn't separate some couples, the police would have to [9; 718].

Conclusion

The present study has explored the advantages and disadvantages of divorce, as they are reflected in Anglo-American anti-proverbs. The negative sides of divorce might be of an emotional, physical, and most frequently, financial character. A divorce under certain circumstances, however, is considered by these anti-proverbs not only a tragedy but rather a great relief. While marriage is frequently conceptualized in our corpus as war and lack of peace, prison, slavery, torture, burden, divorce's mission is seen as peacemaking, or freeing spouses from a warlike marital union. Another positive side of divorce is that it also stops the most unwanted interaction with one's mother-in-law. One of the biggest advantages of divorce is when you happen to be the person who gets alimony (most frequently it is women). One thing is for certain, the views expressed in these anti-proverbs are primarily of those misogynous males who clearly are the biased originators of most of them.

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A.T. Литовкина

Ағылшын-америкалық мақал-мәтелдерде ажырасудың оң және теріс жақтары

Мақалада автор ажырасудың оң және теріс жақтарын зерттеді, олардың ағылшын-америкалық мақал-мәтелдерде көрініс тапқаны және қолданысы (мақалдардың «өзгерістерінде», немесе трансформаларында) тұжырымдалды. Бірінші бөлімде сұрақтардың теориясы мен терминологиясы қысқаша баяндалды. Мақаланың екінші бөлімінде ажырасу тақырыбына байланысты антимақалдарға талдаулар келтірілді, олардың материалдарда ажырасудың оң және теріс жағы қарастырылған. Осы мақалада қарастырылған антимақалдар мысалдарының барлығы америкалық немесе британдық басылымдарда, граффити, тырнақшалар, афоризмдер, сюжеттер, эпиграммалар жинақтарында және В. Мидер мен А.Т. Литовкина редакциялаған ағылшын-америкалық антимақалдарының екі жинағында жарық көрген.

Кілт сөздер: антимақал, неке, ажырасу, күйеуі, әйелі, ажырасудың оң және жағымсыз жақтары.

A.T. Литовкина

Позитивные и негативные стороны развода в англо-американских анти-пословицах

В статье исследованы позитивные и негативные стороны развода, как они видятся и концептуализируются в англо-американских антипословицах (пословичных «переделках», или трансформах). В первой части кратко освещены теория вопроса и терминология. Во второй части статьи представлен анализ антипословиц, затрагивающих тему развода, на материале которых рассмотрены позитивные и негативные стороны развода. Практически все тексты примеров антипословиц, рассматриваемых в статье, были найдены в американских или британских печатных источниках, в

сборниках граффити, цитат, афоризмов, максим, эпиграмм и опубликованы в двух сборниках англо-американских антипословиц под редакцией В. Мидера и А.Т. Литовкиной.

Ключевые слова: антипословицы, брак, развод, муж, жена, позитивные и негативные стороны развода.